

Jackson (Jas.)

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

JOHN GORHAM, M. D.

ON THE 31ST DAY OF MARCH, 1829,

BY THE APPOINTMENT OF

The Boston Medical Association,

And published at their request.

BY JAMES JACKSON, M. D.

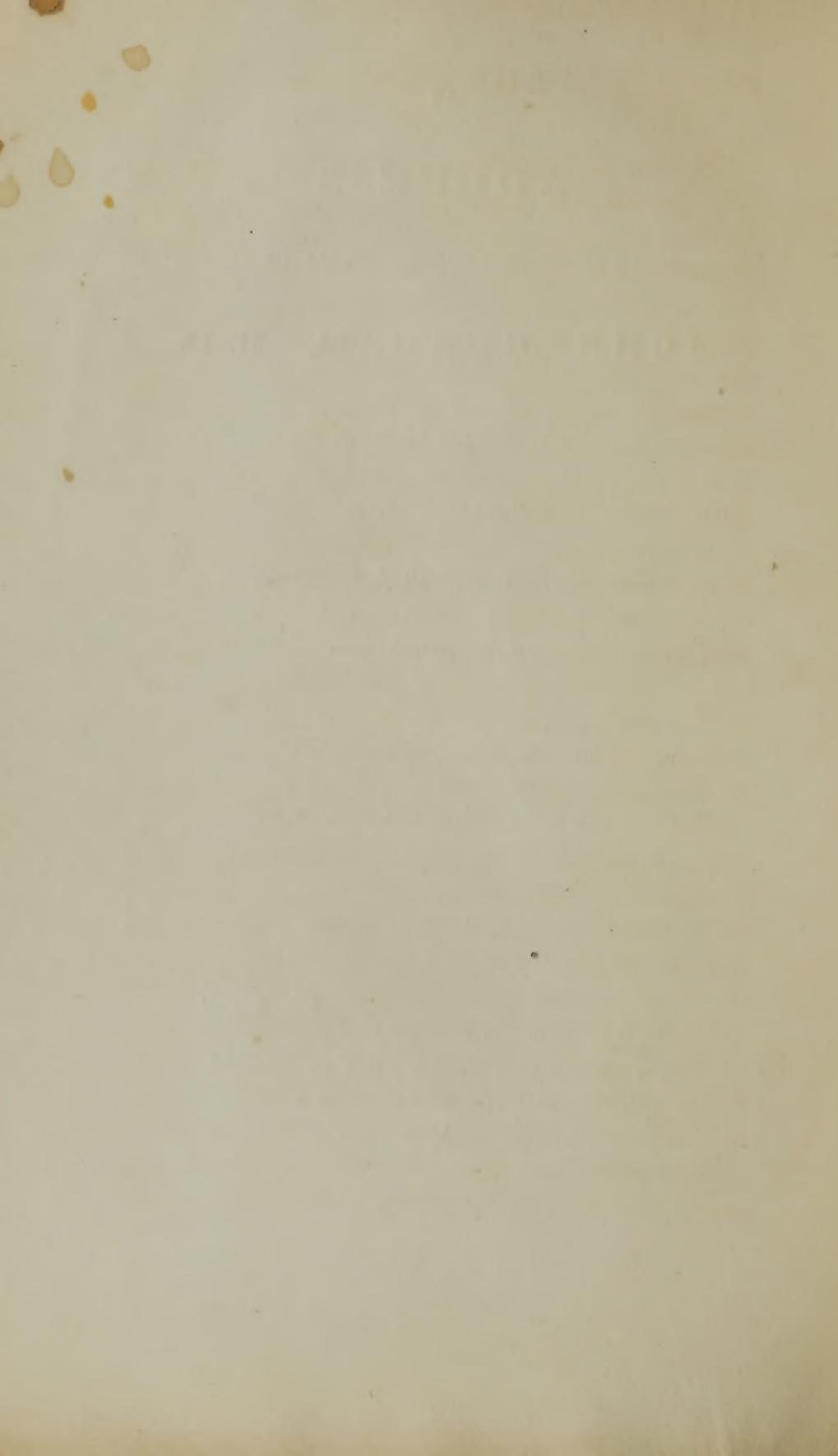


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A D D R E S S.

Dr John Gorham was born in the year 1783, and was the son of a respectable merchant of this place. He lived to complete his forty-sixth year. He died in the midst of his usefulness ; when he was in the plenitude of professional success, and when he seemed prepared to spend many years in serving his friends and the community ; prepared to spend many years in promoting the cause of true knowledge, of real, useful science, and the best interests of humanity. He was looked to as a sure pillar, firmly erected ; but he has fallen ; fallen suddenly and unexpectedly. It becomes us to bow without a murmur to the decision of an all-wise Providence. But we are not called upon to stifle our regrets, to choak a natural sorrow. It is not our duty coldly to resign, without a memorial and without a tear, the dearest and best gifts which our merciful Father has bestowed on us. Let us rather show our gratitude to Heaven, by declaring how highly we value its blessings, and especially the examples of great moral worth.

In saying this, I express the feelings which have prompted my professional brethren to depute one of their number to speak in their name, to declare how dear the deceased was to them, and to show some of the causes of their respect and affection.

Dr Gorham was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts in our university, at the age of eighteen, in the first year of the present century. He shortly commenced the study of medicine, and was one of the most distinguished among the many pupils who were under the care of that celebrated physician and surgeon, the late

Dr John Warren. I cannot pass by this period of his life, in which I first knew him, without noticing the impression he made. His appearance was peculiarly youthful, and he seemed scarcely fitted for the sober and manly studies of a responsible profession. But on closer observation, he showed that the playfulness of youth did not exclude the serious determination to fit himself for his future labors; while the openness of his countenance, his ingenuous manners, his correct habits, and his ready comprehension, gave the most pleasing presages of his ultimate success.

Having passed through the usual period of professional study, Dr Gorham went abroad to qualify himself more fully for active life. He passed two years in the schools of Paris, London, and Edinburgh, under the best medical teachers. He was fully alive to the great advantages he enjoyed. His love of knowledge was increased by seeing the benefits, which its attainment bestowed, at once on its professors and on their fellow-men. The youth cannot at once form an estimate of the extent to which the diligent exercise of his own powers may carry him. By seeing those, who have made great progress in the paths of science, he is enabled to fix on the points at which he may aim; and, by personal communication with the great masters in any branch of science or art, he discovers that they have arrived at distinction by steady industry. Office is sometimes obtained without this; a chair and a gown may be granted by favoritism; but real permanent distinction, an elevated rank and authority in the opinions of one's fellows, are not accorded to any man, except for that knowledge, which comes not by inheritance, nor by gift, nor by intuition; but by study,

labor, close thought, and devoted attention. In realizing all this, a young man learns that he need not distrust himself; and that, at least, enough of honor, if he looks for that, or of usefulness which is much better, will be within his reach, if he will pursue that path which alone leads to it. This he may learn anywhere; but he is animated to press onwards by seeing the most successful and most eminent men of his day, and by realizing that they are men like himself. It is in this way, as well as by the actual knowledge they obtain, that young men are benefited in our profession by visiting the great schools of Europe; by visiting the schools, wherever they are, in which the greatest masters teach. Medicine is an art; but an art which can never be practised by positive rules. It has to do with the living, and consists in attending to and controlling the influence of all nature, moral and physical, upon the ever-changing living body. It is an art which can never be carried to absolute perfection; and which cannot be practised with any great advantage, without an acquaintance with various sciences, the principles of which are to be consulted daily in the exercise of it. In seeing the greatest masters apply these various sciences with success, the youth learns the importance of a diligent study of their elements at the period in which alone they can be well studied. The neglect of such study in early life can never be atoned for.

In pursuing this course of thought I have certainly had in view the benefits, which may result from suggesting it to young men. But I was in truth led into it by calling to mind the actual course of our respected friend. He returned to his native place and engaged in medical practice in 1806. He returned with his

mind enriched by the stores of knowledge, which he had acquired abroad. He returned not puffed up, but strengthened ; not feeling as if he had attained, but as if he could attain and would attain, with God's good blessing, the knowledge which would make him useful to society and an ornament to his profession ; he returned knowing that the study of our art has no end, and resolved that while he lived, he would never cease to pursue this study. Though he exhibited no extravagant ardor, such appeared to me to be the effect of his visit to Europe on Dr Gorham. He retained, as indeed he did through life, the appearance of youthfulness in a remarkable degree. With the sprightliness, the good humour, and the ingenuousness, which made him acceptable in all circles, he was found to be enriched with knowledge also, which insured him respect and consideration. His first steps to public distinction were rapid ; he was soon known as the best chemist in our vicinity.

He was not perhaps more particularly fond of this branch of science than of some others. But he had a philosophical mind, and was interested in all scientific pursuits. His attention to chemistry was determined as much, at least, by the circumstances of the day as by a peculiar love for it.

The late Dr Dexter, whose character and memory deserve the tribute of our sincere respect, had been at that time professor of chemistry in our University for more than twenty years. The business of this office was necessarily secondary, his time having been principally occupied in professional practice. He was now getting advanced in life ; and since he had arranged his lectures the science of chemistry had undergone a

great revolution. He had not been withheld, by bigotry to early opinions, from adopting the current principles, which had been so splendidly announced from the French school. But the study of the modern improvements in their details could not well be prosecuted by him, in the circumstances in which he was placed. He felt desirous to lead some young man, who had commenced his studies under better auspices, to devote himself to this interesting branch of science, and to fit himself for a teacher in the university. He was attracted, no doubt, like others, by the agreeable qualities of Dr Gorham; but his sagacity discovered also that his young friend had the essential qualities for the purpose he had in view. Within a year or two after Dr Gorham's return from Europe, Dr Dexter stated to him his own views, and offered to use his influence with the proper authorities to have Dr Gorham appointed adjunct professor of chemistry, if he would devote his attention particularly to that science.

This plan was carried into effect; and in 1809 the appointment took place. From that time Dr Gorham's services in the medical school of our university contributed very largely to the reputation and usefulness of that institution. He succeeded among the students, as among all other classes of persons, in securing their affection, while he afforded them useful instruction. And I may here add, that he has had the gratification, in a large part of his subsequent life, of having his pupils, not much younger than himself, among his companions and intimate friends. He was popular as a lecturer, knowing how to adapt his teaching to different classes of auditors; and accordingly he gave frequent courses on chemistry to mixed companies, among whom were many of our most respectable ladies.

In 1816, Dr Dexter having resigned his office, Dr Gorham was appointed his successor as Erving Professor of Chemistry and Mineralogy. This appointment gave, I believe, entire satisfaction to all the friends of science in our community.

The attractions of chemistry never prevented our friend from attending to his professional practice. But this practice, though respectable in amount, did not increase so rapidly for several years, as has happened to some others.

Possibly his reputation as a chemist might have induced, in some persons, a belief that he could not have devoted due attention to the other branches of medical science. This, however, was far from being true. He always regarded the practice of medicine as his principle business. His progress, though measured for a while, was sure. Those who employed him, found him not only agreeable, but prompt, prudent, faithful and skilful. Accordingly, having laid a broad and solid foundation, his business became ultimately very extensive among the best part of our community. Several years since he found the duties of his professorship, though they had grown very familiar and easy to him, occupied more time than his practice would allow. He had become attached to those duties, but he felt compelled to relinquish them.— This he did first in part, giving up the instruction of the undergraduates at Cambridge; and two years since he resigned his office wholly.

I need not say how much this resignation was regretted by his colleagues and by all who were connected with the Medical School. For his own sake, however, it was time that he should make this sacri-

fice. His labors were growing too severe ; and since his resignation his business has continued to increase so rapidly that he has not found the relief from toil which he had anticipated. His equanimity and the natural buoyancy of his spirits have done much to hold him up ; but the pressure of business has borne hard upon his constitution. He has experienced what men of integrity and of sensibility must always experience from a great amount of business in the medical profession ; that it was difficult and almost impossible to give the care, which common prudence enjoined, to his own health, while that of so many of his fellow-beings depended on his watchfulness and attention. His death, which may be, I think, called premature, must be attributed to the amount and constancy of his labors and to the frequency of his untimely exposures. He had not the warning of minor ailments, as happens to many men, to apprise him of the risks he encountered. He therefore pressed forward in the race, until arrested by a sudden and overwhelming disease in one of the vital organs of the body.

The evils, to which practitioners of medicine are exposed, when engaged in very extensive business, are commonly acknowledged, but not perhaps fully and duly realized. It may be useful to members of the profession, as well as to the public, to advert to them briefly. The young physician, whatever his talents, or however great his acquirements, advances slowly in the public confidence. He passes years under distressing doubts of his ultimate success ; and, perhaps, by the most assiduous attention scarcely obtains the means of a decent support. If at length his character

is established and his calls are greatly multiplied, though his mind is cheered, his difficulties are not diminished. With an increased income he finds his expenditures to increase, often in full proportion ; owing to his inability to devote any time to matters of domestic economy. He is thus induced to promote, rather than to restrain, the further extension of his practice. He is called daily, among his patients, to point out the evils of undue labor, without regard to the health of the body which is requisite for that labour. This happens especially in cities. He demonstrates to his patients how surely they will defeat their own purposes by too incessant a devotion of time and effort to their pursuit. But he is hurried on himself, while he forgets or neglects to follow the rules which he has prescribed to others. His difficulties, however, are peculiar. His occupation scarce admits of any methodical arrangement ; and he can have no fixed periods of repose. He is at the call of every man and the call is always urgent. Whom shall he refuse ? The poor and the unfortunate ? If so, he is denounced as avaricious, even should his own mind be satisfied that the refusal is necessary. Shall he neglect the calls of the rich ? A single instance of neglect may give permanent offence. The rich feel that they have the best claim on him ; and they have so, for they support him. Under these circumstances it is only by the physical impossibility of being in more than one place at a time, that his labors are limited. Even in sickness he often most imprudently continues his efforts to help others ; and lays them on the bed of rest, while he aggravates his own disease by incessant activity. Meanwhile he has not the intervals of refresh-

ment enjoyed by other men. The night is frequently given to watching, and the sabbath brings no respite. Nor are the physician's fatigues to be estimated merely by his bodily exertions. Neither will it be sufficient to add the amount of his intellectual labors. The responsibility of his office, the anxiety to which he is subjected, the painful sympathy to which he is often excited, tend to exhaust his powers and often draw largely on the sources of life and health.

In these remarks I have endeavored to depict indeed, but not to exaggerate, the evils of extensive medical practice. That they are not more manifest and more constantly injurious is owing to alleviations which it may be just to acknowledge. These alleviations arise from the variety of the physician's occupations, from the preponderance of the cases of recovery over those which are fatal ; and, above all, from the confidence and gratitude, which he so often experiences, among the most estimable and most interesting subjects of his care. Of these alleviations the deceased enjoyed, as I believe, and justly, his full share.

Dr Gorham formed at an early period that interesting connexion on which so large a share of men's social happiness depends ; and he was happy in forming it. He married Mary, the eldest daughter of the late Dr Warren.

As a good citizen, he is known to you all. He submitted to the laws, and performed the duties, which in our country appertain to every man, without indulging at any time a desire for political distinction. He was ready to aid in every good work and that without display. He took an interest in our most valuable public institutions for the promotion of learning and knowl-

edge. As a scholar and man of science he has been highly estimated. In 1819, he published the first volume of his elements of Chemical Science ; and in the year following the second volume. This work, like others of the same kind, may lose its value by the constant and rapid progress of the science which it teaches ; but it will remain as an evidence of the extensive acquisitions he had made, of his sound judgment and facility in treating abstruse subjects. He was likewise the author of many valuable papers in the periodical works published among us during the last twenty years. He was at an early age elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and has received various other marks of respect from learned bodies.

He has been many years a distinguished Fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society, and one of its Counsellors. He has held the offices of Treasurer, Recording Secretary, and Censor of that Society, and performed the duties of these offices from a regard to the common good. He was appointed to deliver the annual discourse to the Society at their meeting in June next, and to act as their delegate at a Convention of the Physicians of the United States, to be held at Washington in January 1830. Little was it apprehended that a failure in these duties would arise from the deplorable event, which has now called us together. It is well perhaps that we should so far calculate on the continuance of life, as to pledge ourselves in advance to aid in good works. If it is only to good and useful works we pledge ourselves, and if in such only we are occupied, it need not abate our zeal that we may not live to complete them. To live well, to cultivate love to God and good-will to men, how much

more important is it than to live long ! When such has been the course pursued by our friends, grievous though it be, there is a sweet and heart-felt pleasure to compensate us in following them to the grave. Such a consolation, I believe, we may all feel in gathering at this time around the remains of him who lies before us. So pure was his heart, so correct his principles, so exemplary his life, that his memory will long be cherished, not with tears and repining, but with the feelings which give a sort of joy and sunshine, while they elevate those who entertain them. We would indeed have prolonged his life and had his good company on the remainder of our journey ; but we would prefer the short enjoyment, when so pure, to his protracted existence, if of less elevated usefulness and character.

Our friend was not without his faults surely ; though I came here to speak well of him, yet I would not use the unqualified language of eulogy. He had his faults. But they exhibited themselves, like the blushes on his fair cheek, openly and transiently ; and like those blushes they were superficial. They did not come from the heart. There was not any deep, any allowed vice in that. He seemed to have less bad feeling to be controlled and repressed than most of us, so happily was he constituted. In his manner there was nothing precise, but the contrary. He never seemed guarded. He appeared not to be conscious of any thing which he needed to conceal. He might be careless in his intercourse with others and inadvertently give offence ; but this was so obviously unintentional, that the effect could not be permanent. The offensive word or act was impelled with so little force, if I may use the figure, that it could not make any

deep impression and it could not excite any strong reaction. But ordinarily his manners, though not formal, were courteous and urbane. They had the polish of good-breeding. Their charm, however, had a deeper source. Their amenity was such as art never gives. It came from the heart; and that is the reason that it went to the heart.

I would not, however, represent our friend as the creature of impulse merely; though certainly he was much indebted to his happy temperament. He was in the habit of sober reflection on his important duties to God and man. He remembered the first great commandment, and the second which is like unto it. He reflected, as I believe, carefully on the subject of religion and deliberately settled his faith. He was a believer in christianity and he wished to regulate his life by its precepts, while he relied on the mercy of the Supreme Being, which it unfolds. He looked to the gospel of our Saviour to purify his heart; not to repress the gaiety, which the most pure hearts seem best entitled to indulge. In the brief and severe disease which terminated his life he was apprised by his friends, as well as by his own knowledge, of the danger which hung over him. He looked at it with calmness; and with the most perfect composure he made some necessary arrangements in case of a fatal termination of his disease.

In this hurried address I have been drawn off continually to the consideration of the moral traits, which at all times, but at this moment especially, the memory of our departed friend must suggest to those who have had much intercourse with him. But his intellectual character likewise demands our attention. I

have said that he had a philosophical mind. He knew how to analyze a complex subject, to examine its elements distinctly, to discover their mutual relations :— and he had the love of truth. It belonged to the simplicity of his character, if it may so be expressed, to look at truth by itself, and to bow to it, without inquiring whither it would lead him. The connexion which this characteristic has with moral excellence, though an interesting subject, I shall not stop to discuss. But though well qualified for philosophical investigations, Dr Gorham pursued them perhaps more from a sense of duty than from taste. He enjoyed them, indeed. Yet he could enjoy more keenly literature and the fine arts. He was extremely susceptible of pleasure from the beautiful. He had a taste for music, painting and poetry. If he could be seduced at any time it was by the pleasures of the imagination. But he controlled the love of these pleasures, resorting to them only as a useful relaxation. So likewise he enjoyed social intercourse in the highest degree; and his bright countenance, his playful vivacity, and his easy and instructive conversation made him a great accession to any circle. But he entered on the business of life with so deep an impression of the importance of its active duties, that he indulged himself in social pleasures with great moderation. In philosophical investigations on the contrary, as connected with his profession especially, he engaged with steadiness from a regard to their utility.

It is certain that Dr Gorham was very acceptable to society at large, that he attached to himself the sick under his charge, and the confidence of their friends, and that he was peculiarly beloved by his professional

brethren. The traits of his character which I have pointed out, however imperfectly, will explain these effects. During twenty years and more I know not that he has made an enemy. His professional success has been hailed with joy among his brethren and competitors, as I believe without an exception. The interest with which they inquired concerning him during the short and violent disease which proved fatal, the mutual condolence among them at his death, their unanimous desire to pay honor to his memory at this time, testify in what estimation they held him. And all these circumstances show that I have not erred in the amount of praise bestowed on his character, however unskilful I may have been in portraying its features, in analysing its elements, or in tracing his virtues to their source. I would not offend his memory by excessive commendation ; his love of truth was so sincere that I would respect it sacredly even in making his eulogy.

I have already suggested the best consolations we have in his loss. They have their foundation in the same principles which led us to love him. But these consolations cannot at once soothe those who were most nearly allied to him. In the domestic circle, the breach which his death has occasioned, admits not of repair. In the family of such a man, where the affections are so tender and yet so strong, as such a character must engender, no soothing can give relief. It is not to them I would venture to speak. To them men should be silent ; while they are left to seek the only solace, the solace which comes from a religious trust in the Father of us all.